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GERMANY AND THE POWERS

BY DR. BERNHARD DERNBURG

WHEN, like a stroke of lightning from a serene blue heaven, the world war broke out in Europe, Americans stood dumfounded, amazed, and horrified. All the attainments of twentieth-century civilization seemed to crumble under their very feet. All the endeavors that had been made to settle international difficulties by treaties or arbitration seemed to be absolutely futile. All the protestations that the various peoples of Europe had been making continuously for peace and good-will were discredited. It was not so much the resentment against the disturbance of trade, the stopping of exports, and inconvenience of unbalanced financial relations, the anxiety for a host of relatives and friends who had been entrapped in the warring countries, that roused this American feeling; the public on this side was deeply hurt in its ethical feeling, in its moral attitude, toward solemn obligations, in its sympathies for smaller nations. What was all that civilization that the world had been boasting of so much? What did the word "culture" mean if from one day to the next Europe could become the field of brutality, burning, and sacking? Was not the world thrown back for a century or more, and were not all the sincere endeavors to bring about a more human state of things by international treaties permanently in danger by this spectacle of treaties being disregarded and torn to shreds? What would all this mean for the United States? Had she not let herself be inveigled into a spirit of security, into an optimism without foundation, into the hope for a better and more peaceful world?

The breaking out of the war was considered here as a crime against humanity, and it cannot be wondered at that the next question was, Who was the author of that crime? Who permitted it, by act or tolerance, to be perpetrated? The answer seemed to come quickly on irrefutable evidence. The

brutality of the Austrian ultimatum; the failure of Germany to repress her ally; the Russian feeling for the small boundary states; the French resentment of the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine; the English attitude toward guaranteed treaties—all seemed to be a chain of evidence that laid the blame to the door of Germany, and Germany did not defend herself because she could not—being deprived of direct communication in consequence of the cutting of cables and the stringent British rules against the printing of uncensored news.

So the judgment was quickly formed. It could only be formed on the evidence presented, one-sided though it was. And, in the absence of facts, Americans had to rely on sentiment which strongly favored the Allies.

The greater the American nation has become the more it has built up a civilization of its own. The more intense national life has grown, the less Americans have had reason to busy themselves with the happenings in far-away countries, and as little as it can be expected that the men in the interior of Russia should know anything of American institutions and statecraft, as little can it be fairly demanded that Americans should be intimately acquainted with the intricacies of European politics.

Therefore it may not be amiss to try to sketch the state of things in Europe as it has been, the various peoples involved, their aims, ambitions, and necessities, the driving forces behind them, and the historical development that resulted in the explosion.

The immediate cause was the trouble between Austria and Servia. Servia has played the foremost part in the Balkans, as Professor Sloane in his remarkable book, *The Balkans, a Historical Laboratory*, has pictured. A strong and valorous people, dominated mostly by its clans, practically without industry, a peasant nation, continuously engaged for centuries in fights for national existence and in internal strifes for the supremacy of the great chieftains. Expansive, as all the Slav peoples, Servia has sought for many years to enlarge her territory. There were two possibilities: either at the expense of Turkey or at the expense of Austria-Hungary, in whose confines several millions of Serbs are living. "All Slavs are brethren"—that is the doctrine. All Slavs must be under Slavish rulers, and all territory inhabited by Serbs is part of an unalienable inheritance of

the Servian kingdom. So, a "Greater Serbia" has been the aim of a people who had not many cultural goods to defend, no great wealth to effeminate them, frugal and warlike as they were. In order not to go back too deep into history, I would refer my readers to the Balkan Alliance, consisting of two treaties, the one between Serbia and Bulgaria of February 29, 1912, and the second between Greece and Bulgaria of May 16, 1912. These treaties contain secret clauses that were published in 1913 in *Le Matin* of Paris. These secret clauses provide for a division of the Balkans between Serbia and Bulgaria on a north-southerly line, leaving the western part to Serbia, the eastern part to Bulgaria. The open part of the treaty provides for a purely defensive alliance; the secret part shows the aims and the element that has been dominant in the bringing about of that alliance, directed, as to Serbia, against Austria, and as to Bulgaria, against Turkey. This dominant factor is Russia. Article First of the secret clauses says:

That if Serbia and Bulgaria convene to act, it is to be communicated to Russia, and if Russia does not oppose itself, the action will proceed. If they cannot agree as to an action, they will apply to Russia, whose decision will be obligatory upon both parties. Should Russia not give any opinion at all and the two parties cannot concert, that party that will undertake an action must proceed alone, the other keeping in friendly neutrality supported by partial mobilization.

Article Three says:

A copy of this treaty and of its secret clauses will be jointly communicated to the Russian Government, which will be asked to take note of it, and to give proof of its good-will regarding the ends sought, and the Emperor of Russia will be asked to kindly accept and approve for his person and his Government the rôle assigned to them in the treaty. All differences that should result from the interpretation or execution of the treaty are to be submitted to the definite decision of Russia.

And Article Fifth says:

This appendix is not to be published without the consent of Russia.

Thus it will be seen Russia was able to pull the strings, and she did. When Italy seized upon Tripoli, and the Turkish fleet was engaged with the Italian navy that took possession of a number of islands in the *Ægean*, the war was started against Turkey, and it looked for a moment as if she were to be driven out of Europe altogether. But Bulgaria aspired for more of the conquered territory than Rus-

sia was willing to concede, for reasons we shall see hereafter, and a new war broke out between Servia and Greece on the one side, and Bulgaria on the other. Bulgaria was brought very near to destruction; then the Czar of Bulgaria addressed himself for help to Austria. It was at this juncture that Russia saw fit to publish the secret clause of the treaty showing that Bulgaria had conspired with her and with Servia to fight Austria. Peace was finally concluded in Bucharest—a peace that was not to the satisfaction of Austria. She tried to engage Germany in her attempt to annul the Bucharest protocol—which Germany refused to do, although thereby greatly grieving her ally, in the interests of the peaceful people of the world. So Servia attained her end in about doubling her size; but the spirit of conquest cannot be repressed once it has started and has been successful. The Servian aim had been to gain free access to a harbor on the Adriatic. Austria had opposed herself, the Greater Servian dream remained still unfulfilled, and Servia now directed her attention to the Austrian provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, because the Austrian interests in the western part of the Balkans barred Servia's way to the sea. Then those conspiracies set in, sowing discord among Austrian peoples, inveigling into mutiny Austrian subjects, swamping Bosnia and the south of Hungary with Servian literature; it ended in the murder of the Crown Prince of Austria and his wife on June 28th, and nobody who knew anything at all of the doings in the Balkans could have the slightest doubt that Servia only tackled her big neighbor because of the promise of Russia to stand by her, as was evidenced by the treaty above cited. The aims of Servia are commensurate with the nature of her people, with the state of her culture, with the ambitions of her statesmen.

But why did Russia countenance all that? Among all the Slav peoples Russia has been the most restive for ages. She has added to her dominions constantly and is now the empire of the greatest territorial extension. She is autocratic, and she must keep the minds of her people busy. It is from her soil that all the hordes have ever penetrated into Europe, from the times of Ghengis-Khan and Timur-i-leng—Mongols, Tartars, and Poles. She has spread out east and south, her efforts always alternating in the two directions. An enormous empire that is turning now its efforts toward the building up of an indus-

try. Having been defeated in the East in 1904, unable to retrieve her defeat by Japan in consequence of the British alliance with Japan, and being handicapped in the efforts to reach the Indian Ocean by the British-Russian compact of 1907, she again turned her eyes to the south. World commerce and world power are no longer confined to continents. Any considerable export trade demands access to the sea, a mercantile marine, and a certain liberty of movement. Look how she is situated in that respect! This enormous empire, the largest on earth, has not even one outlet to the sea accessible at all times of the year. Her northern harbor, Archangel, is icebound as early as September. It is connected with its industrial center only by one single-track line of more than a thousand miles. The harbor of Kronstadt is equally ice-bound in the winter, and it is, moreover, only a harbor to the Baltic, that is dominated by Germany. A third harbor, Vladivostok, on the far Japan Sea, is of no account, freezing up also very early in the year. Her attempt to get into the Chinese Sea by way of Port Arthur has been finally frustrated, by Japan forcing Russia to retire from it in 1904, when equally she lost her chance of reaching out by way of Korea. But all the strong Northern peoples have always had their eyes on more clement climates, and there has been from time immemorial a constant pressing of Gauls and Teutons, of Slavs and Mohammedan Indians, toward the ocean to the south. But here again Russia finds herself absolutely barred. All attempts to get free access to the Mediterranean have invariably come to naught. The Powers interested in the Mediterranean did not want another strong Power to compete with them there, or to menace their domination. So Russia in her attempts to break the Turkish rule in the Dardanelles has always been opposed by the rest of Europe. The Crimean War was waged in 1854 against Russia by the combined forces of Turkey, France, and England, and ended in the Paris protocol, re-establishing the control of Turkey over the Bosphorus, and forbidding any men-of-war to pass by Constantinople. When, by the help of Rumania, Russia was victorious in 1878 and forced upon Turkey the treaty of San Stefano, dictating its terms under the very doors of Constantinople, Europe interceded, and Russia was thrown back by the Congress of Berlin, and her efforts were again frustrated. But in 1908 she addressed herself to Austria for

a revision of the Paris treaty of 1856. Austria, while amenable to Russian demands, made her assent contingent upon French and English consent, and these two Powers did not see their way to satisfy her.

So the national tendency of Russia to get to Constantinople, and the Servian ambitions to get an outlet to the Adriatic, strengthened the natural political tie between the countries. Now it is easily understood why Bulgaria was not permitted to press forward to Constantinople, or to gain a great addition to her power. Once on the Bosphorus a "Greater Bulgaria" would prove an unsafe factor to the Russian aims; therefore Bulgaria was first called back and then defeated with Russian assistance.

What was Austria's interest in this game? Her trade is mostly Oriental. Wherever the Russians go, the open door is closed. The looming up of a big Power on the southerly frontier meant the tearing from her of the Slav parts—a very great danger that in fact necessitated, as every one knows, a huge addition to the Austrian and German armaments in 1913. She could not split up her Slav parts without falling all to pieces. There are Rumanians in the east of Hungary; there are Serbs on the Hungarian frontier on the Danube; there are a great many of the same population in Bosnia-Herzegovina; and then, also, the great Bohemian crown land for the most part is Slav. She had a large interest in maintaining her treaty rights with Turkey. She knew of the relentless hatred of the Serbs, who could not enlarge their frontiers to the west, and the known Russian enmity that barred her way to the *Ægean* Sea. Austria's situation became unbearable, and the assassination of Serajevo was just a spark that fell into the powder-cask.

But could Germany forsake Austria in her struggle for life that she had to take up? In the first place, Germany had been the ally of Austria ever since 1879, for the avowed purpose of preventing Russian aggression. Then Austria is not only peopled with Slav and Hungarians—she is also a German nation—more than twelve million of her people (about twenty-five per cent.) being German by race, by language, and by civilization. The partition of Austria would have left that great part of the real kernel and backbone of the Dual Monarchy in a hopelessly impotent and reduced position, surrounded on two sides by people of a different

race, inferior cultural attainments, and an easy prey to either of the contending factors. If the bonds of nationality, of language and culture, count for anything, Germany could not do that. And then, for her, there is another consideration of equal importance: Germany is a nation of fast-increasing population. She is industrial for the most part. She can keep her people busy at home only by having the markets of the world open to German goods. The closing of the Bosphorus by Russia would have excluded her enterprise for ever from Western Asia, where she has been doing so much cultural work, and would have left the enormous Asiatic Continent to be further divided by England and Russia. All her just endeavors to peaceful commercial expansion would have been thwarted. On the other hand, the breaking up of Austria would have meant a complete isolation of Germany, with the enormous danger of an array of the Powers against her as seen in this war. So when Austria had to fight, as she had, Germany had to join with her.

We now come to the situation of France. It is said that she is fighting for revenge, and revenge is generally interpreted as retribution for the taking of Alsace-Lorraine. But that is only the outward sign of the decay of French power. For hundreds of years France had been the foremost Power of the European Continent. She was dictating its politics, she dominated the cabinets of Europe, from the times of Richelieu and Louis XIV.; from the time of Mazarin to the French Revolution; from Napoleon I. to Talleyrand's splendid work at the Vienna Congress and as Ambassador at the Court of St. James's, down to finally Napoleon III., the French Court was always the focus of splendor, might, and imperiousness. France has been, as she styles herself always, *la grande nation*, and it was a rude awakening and a terrible disappointment when the power of United Germany definitely removed her from that position. Given to good living and comfort, and to the two-children system, she continuously lost ground as against parsimonious, frugal, and inventive Germany. The well-known tendency of Germany for family life and the raising of children under the home roof made the difference in population every year greater. Thirty-eight millions in 1870 in France and a like number in Germany changed into thirty-nine millions in the former and into nearly seventy millions in the latter country. So she felt that she could not

hold her own single-handedly, and she had to seek alliances which were not to be had for the asking. She found an ally in the Russian antagonism toward Germany that had sprung up ever since Bismarck had made himself the "honest broker" of Europe at the Berlin Congress, when the prize of her war against Turkey was definitely wrested from her. France had to engage to finance Russian railways, Russian state needs, and Russian armament. She had to loan to Russia more than ten billion francs of her savings in order to maintain that friendship. So there were two motives that caused France to draw nearer and nearer to Russia and to become the bonded ally to a Power so foreign to French culture and French ideals. The first motive was to regain her lost position in Europe. The second was the fear of losing her savings invested in Russia. Had she stood out, Russia would not have hesitated to cancel all her indebtedness to France by a single stroke of her autocratic pen. It was this sort of entanglement that brought France into this European war.

Let us come to England.

It has been maintained that her jealousy against German trade, German sea power, German industry, and German expansion had been guiding factors. They had certainly a very great deal to do with the public feeling in England, and it is public sentiment to which Great Britain, more than any other nation, thinks she must listen. Sir Edward Grey, in a despatch, on August 1st (reprinted under No. 123 of the English "White Book"), to Sir Edward Goschen, makes clear this point. He says that the German attitude with regard to Belgium affected feeling in England. If Germany could give the same assurance as France had given, it would materially contribute to relieve anxiety and tension in England. If Belgian neutrality was violated, it would be extremely difficult to restrain public feeling in that country. "He [Count Lichnowsky] asked me whether if Germany would promise not to violate Belgian neutrality we would engage to remain neutral. I replied that I could not say that. . . . Our attitude would be determined largely by public opinion." He did not think that they could give a promise of neutrality on that condition *alone*. The German Ambassador pressed him as to whether he could not formulate conditions on which England would remain neutral. He even suggested that the integrity of

France and her colonies might be guaranteed, but Sir Edward Grey said that he felt obliged to refuse definitely any promise to remain neutral on similar terms, and that England must keep her hands free.

It is clear that public opinion in England, while being strongly influenced by the Belgian case, had other grudges against Germany. That is why Sir Edward Grey would not even formulate conditions to remain neutral if Belgian neutrality was being guaranteed. I wonder why this significant despatch is always disregarded by the Americans formulating a case against Germany. While it is true that this British-German rivalry certainly played a very considerable part in the policy of the British Cabinet, I do not think it was decisive. The English policy for ages past, adapted to the isolation of the British Isles, has been the maintenance of European equilibrium, by which is meant that England saw to it that Europe was arrayed into two hostile camps, as equally matched as possible, while she kept her hands free in order to throw her weight into the balance of that party that served her aims best. Therefore, when France had to go to war as soon as Russia became involved, she was in great fear that this equilibrium might be seriously disturbed. I believe Sir Edward Grey wanted peace under existing conditions; the equilibrium was there, and England had nothing to complain of. But if war was to be declared, France being much the weaker, it was to be expected that she would be thoroughly crushed by the German war machine and the equilibrium would have gone for good. Even if France was not despoiled of any of her provinces or possessions, yet she would have been materially so much weakened that she could not play any further part in the European concert. So England's interest was bound up with France remaining a comparatively strong Power. And so, with eyes always on that point, England became entangled beyond what she ever expected. As early as November 22, 1912, Sir Edward Grey, without the knowledge of the Cabinet, exchanged letters with the French Ambassador, acknowledging an arrangement whereby the entire French fleet was sent to the Mediterranean to protect the joint interests there, while the English fleet was concentrated in the North Sea. This arrangement could not be changed when the war broke out. Sir Edward Grey said that much in a speech on August 3rd

in the House of Commons. He was bound to protect French coasts and had to see to it that the French were not being reduced. It will now be understood why the English always talk of the necessity of reducing Germany to a second-rate Power by crushing out her military force. That is the only way by which France can be strengthened and England can return to her former policy. She was afraid of German expansion, as of the German inroads into English trade. But that was not paramount. Paramount was the English interest of re-establishing a state of things such as had been the case before 1870. She knows that her next big struggle will be with Russia over her Asiatic possessions, and must keep her hands free for that, and be reassured of the state of Europe. Therefore, no matter what happened before war broke out, as soon as it was certain to come she had to be a party to it.

I stated the case of Germany as I proceeded. I have now to speak of three Powers that play a smaller rôle in the conflict: First, there is Japan. Next to Russia, Japan has been the most expansive Power, and since 1894 has acquired possession and control of three times what she had before that date. She is now out for the coast of China, pretending to fight the Germans in Kiao-Chou, while at the same time taking possession of all the railways from Peking south to the valley of the Yangtse. She means to dominate that part of China, just as she dominates the southern part of Manchuria, by controlling all the lines of communication, fortifying her position along those railways by putting in garrisons under the name of "railway guards," and definitely ousting European competition that cannot be maintained against the craft and frugality of the yellow man. That is a side issue whose bearing upon America I do not feel called upon to detail.

Then there is Portugal. Here there is a remarkable double play. While England is apparently assisting the Republic of Portugal and egging her on to go to war, by telling her that German expansion means a loss of Portuguese colonies, she is harboring at the same time in her confines the ex-King of Portugal; is the centre of the royalist revolutionary movements against Portugal, and she feels assured that whichever way this struggle turns she will have all the advantage.

Then I come to the case of Belgium, that made so much

stir in the United States. She also is not to be exonerated from blame. Belgium feels much safer as a buffer state in the interests of England, who she believed would maintain her independence and integrity, as England cannot permit any first-class Power to control the entrance to the North Sea. Belgium belongs geographically to Germany. So by playing upon Belgian fear that she, whose main harbor, Antwerp, is a natural outlet to the growing German industries, would become a German vassal, and by promising Belgium British help, assisting her in her fortifications, she made Belgium resist the two overtures of the German Chancellor, who promised integrity and indemnity in case Germany marched through Belgium. I will not dwell here on the treaty relations which Mr. Gladstone himself called a most complicated affair, and which he thought must not be maintained if they were against the English interests at the time when the occasion of acting under the guarantee arose. It was Great Britain's interest that this neutrality should be kept, but it was certainly not England's reason for the war, as is made clear by the despatch of Sir Edward Grey cited above.

The German Government has been taxed with considering treaties as "scraps of paper." That is certainly not the German record, nor the German position toward treaties. But this treaty was a scrap of paper; the English on their side did not put any faith in it, nor were they prepared to maintain it under all circumstances. They did not consider it enforceable in 1870, and replaced it by new arrangements between the North German Confederation and France. The Chancellor regretted very much that he had to go through Belgium, although Belgium had broken that treaty herself in spirit and in letter. The American doctrine is that treaty obligations must not and cannot be kept if it is against public policy (*vide* unanimous judgment rendered in the Chinese Exclusion Treaty cases by the United States Supreme Court, printed in Vol. 130 of *U. S. Reports*, page 600). And I must say that it is one thing to ask a private individual to keep an obligation, even when suffering great loss and inconvenience, and another if a statesman responsible for sixty-six million people who are in danger of losing their liberty, national existence, and civil rights takes upon himself to encounter criticism by the world at large. Belgian neutrality was an instrument played very skilfully by Sir

Edward Grey as a moral proposition. In fact, it was a proposition of public interest also for England, and neutrality had to be protected if England wanted to retain a dominant position on both sides of the Channel.

Then there is another aspect of the matter that Americans generally overlook. They always talk of Germany and Russia and the other countries as doing such and such things. They talk of statesmen having acted so or otherwise. They forget that behind these statesmen, behind these countries, there are hundreds of millions of people who have a life and a volition of their own. They forget that most of these states are guided and conducted by sets of people who do not appear very much in the foreground. The Servian people by itself has probably not been very willing to go to war again after the experience of 1912. There was a Crown Prince who was the real ruler behind the throne, and the military and clan party who, as it is now proven beyond any possibility of refutation, engineered a plot against the Crown Prince of Austria, spread a large propaganda, and drove the people to war by telling them that Austria wanted to exterminate the Servian people, notwithstanding the explicit guarantee of Austria that she would not take any Servian territory. The same is the case in Russia. The Russian people are very illiterate and uncultivated. Seventy out of one hundred Russians do not know how to read and write. They do not read papers. They follow the dictates of their clergy, the call of their "white" Czar, and implicitly believe what they are told. There is a military clique in Russia that has been constantly pressing upon the peaceful Czar that now was the time to get all the things they had wanted for so long. The Czar refused, and closed himself up for four days. The Minister of War was not in the councils of the war party, so it happened that the Russian mobilization went forward without the Czar's signature and after the Minister of War had given his word of honor that no mobilization had been ordered. This Grand-Ducal party finally got the upper hand, as reported by the Belgian Minister in St. Petersburg on July 30th to his Home Government, after having received the assurance that England would second France in case of a conflict. And this was before the Belgian incident ever arose.

Similar conditions obtained in Austria. The Archduke Francis Ferdinand had always cherished the plan of recon-

ciling the Slav portion of the Empire by making out of the Dual Monarchy a tripartite arrangement. Hungary, that would thereby lose most, was much against it. So when the Archduke was out of the way and the Hungarian Premier pressed for a more determined policy, the old emperor was not able to make the same strong resistance.

And the same holds good also in respect to England. Sir Edward Grey never communicated the exchange of letters with the French Ambassador in 1912 to his colleagues. But when this matter could no longer be kept back, the Cabinet was amazed. Three of its members stepped out at once, declaring that they would not have anything more to do with the Government. They were Mr. John Burns, Lord Morley, and Mr. Trevelyan, who in a letter to his constituents in Ellford declared that they had always been told that the hands of England were entirely free, that they were not obligated to France in any way, but that he had found out, to his disgust, that England was so hopelessly entangled that she had to go to war. The leader of the Socialist party, Ramsay McDonald, most severely criticized the Administration upon the same grounds, and the Liberal member of Parliament, Mr. Arthur Ponsonby, wrote a letter most severely arraigning Sir Edward Grey on his double dealing. But there were some hotheads, like Winston Churchill and Lloyd George, and then there was the enormous danger of the Irish civil struggle that loomed up on the horizon and whose consequences could absolutely not be foreseen in a time of European conflagration. The Irish leaders were induced, by the passing of a Home Rule Bill of a very deceptive kind, to come to the aid of the Government, upon the ground of patriotism and national danger.

The only nation that is absolutely united to its Government is Germany. She knows, and it will be apparent to any thoughtful reader of the above recital, that all the nations around her want something of her—have an interest in the struggle, and are willing to fight under all circumstances. Russia wants Constantinople and the weakening of the Austrian monarchy. England demands the reduction of Germany to a subordinate Power; France, the re-establishment of her former dominating rule of Europe. Surely, no one would consider Germany so insane and absolutely bereft of common sense that she should have desired and

permitted all the nations in whose way she had been to fall on her, thereby catering for her own destruction? Will it be believed that a nation that has been constantly striving for peace, the only one of all European nations that has not had war for forty-four years, has never expanded except peacefully, never acquired territory except by treaty, knowing that a combination of much stronger Powers threatened her from all sides, would go wilfully and light-heartedly to fight nearly the whole world? And what had she to gain if she were victorious?

So I put my case, not on doubtful evidence, or on the teachings of people who want to make believe to the American public that diplomacy is the school of truthfulness and that diplomatic papers are a clean source of information, but I put my case, and I rest it, on the history of Europe, on the forces that have been at work, not since the 28th of July, but for many years past, whose self-interest I have made evident and whose powers, aims, and ambitions are explained—an explanation which the average American scholar will be able to verify every day. Germany is united because she knows that she is fighting for her very life and existence, and against Powers who wish to reduce her to her former state of impotency and weakness and to undo the great work of Bismarck, to crush, under Slav dictation, forces that have been a boon to the civilization and advancement of the world.

BERNHARD DERNBURG.